



DIGITAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

World premiere: autonomous on-demand vehicles in normal road traffic

First project with driverless on-demand shuttles in public transport • test phase starts in May in the Rhine-Main area • Federal Ministry of Transport pledges four million euros in funding

(Berlin, 22nd February 2023) Revolution in local public transport: In the Rhine-Main area, a completely new type of mobility will start pilot operation in May this year. Deutsche Bahn (DB), the transport association Rhein-Main-Verkehrsverbund (RMV) and the local partners HEAG mobilo and Kreisverkehrsgesellschaft Offenbach (kvgOF) are testing automated shuttles. These will later be able to travel at regular speed in normal road traffic without a driver.

Such a public transport service is the only one of its kind in the world. The two-year test and implementation phase of the project is made possible by the Federal Ministry of Digital Affairs and Transport (BMDV). Minister Dr. Volker Wissing presented the project partners with the official notification of a grant of four million euros.

Dr. Volker Wissing, Federal Minister for Digital Affairs and Transport: "Particularly in rural areas, the call for more public transport services in the face of low demand often reaches its economic limits. In addition, there will be a shortage of around 87,000 bus drivers in Germany by 2030. This combination presents us with a major problem because we urgently need public transport to achieve our climate goals. Therefore, self-driving e-shuttles that can be called on demand are a real game changer, especially for rural areas. And best of all: this is not science fiction but will be part of the regular public transport service in our country as of next year."

Evelyn Palla, Director of Regional Transport at Deutsche Bahn AG: "We are opening a new chapter in local transport. Autonomous vehicles are a huge opportunity to advance the mobility revolution in rural areas as well. We will thoroughly test the new technology so that our passengers feel comfortable and arrive safely at their destination. Together with our subsidiaries CleverShuttle and ioki, we are making public transport as convenient and flexible as using your own car."

Prof. Knut Ringat, Managing Director of Rhein-Main-Verkehrsverbund: "Over 400,000 highly satisfied passengers, almost two million kilometres travelled, and the German Mobility Award 2022 in the Best Practice category speak for themselves: RMV on-demand is a success story and the ideal complement to bus and rail. Autonomous vehicles are both a revolution and the logical next step. Without a driver, the vehicles can be used even more flexibly, which benefits rural areas in particular."



In May, an autonomous vehicle will be on the road in Darmstadt for the first time. In the months that follow, 14 more vehicles will be added. Eight will be driving in the Offenbach district, seven in Darmstadt. In the first test phase, all shuttles will be on the road with specially trained drivers and without passengers. After a successful second trial period with test customers, the vehicles will be integrated into the existing on-demand services in Darmstadt ("HeinerLiner") and in the Offenbach district ("kvgOF Hopper") and can then be booked by anyone interested.

DB and RMV have already been working together on Germany's largest on-demand network since 2020. Under the umbrella of RMV, the service is available in a total of nine cities and districts. By the end of the year, the project will have more than 100 on-demand vehicles in operation, serving more than 3,000 virtual stops. Due to its size and availability almost around the clock, the on-demand service is a pillar of its own in the region's transport concept.

The declared aim of RMV and DB is to attract new customers to local public transport through flexible on-demand services. This should make a significant contribution to the mobility transition and climate protection.

In addition to RMV, DB and its subsidiaries ioki and CleverShuttle, the local transport companies HEAG mobilo and Kreisverkehrsgesellschaft Offenbach (kvgOF) are involved in the project for "AI-based regular operation of autonomous on-demand transport" (KIRA). The project partner Mobileye, which specialises in autonomous vehicles, is supplying the autonomous driving system and the shuttles. The technology for the interior monitoring is supplied by Robert Bosch GmbH. For the accompanying research, the German Aerospace Center (DLR), the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and the Association of German Transport Companies (VDV) are also part of the BMDV funding.





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About ioki

With over 105 demand-responsive transport services, ioki is one of the leading platform providers for digital on-demand solutions in Europe and market leader in the DACH region. Over 90 per cent of on-demand transport with ioki software complement public transport in suburban or rural regions. Companies, cities and municipalities have relied on our expertise since 2017 to optimise and digitise transport according to demand. These include flagship projects such as ioki Hamburg (now hvv hop) and the Europe-wide largest project for on-demand transport in the Rhine-Main area. As a pioneer for autonomous ride pooling, ioki has been setting milestones for digital and autonomous mobility since its founding – from Germany's first autonomous shuttle bus to the planned world's largest autonomous fleet on demand in public transport. More than 140 employees from more than 20 nations develop equitable and modern mobility solutions for sustainable, attractive local transport from the heart of Europe.

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